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ABSTRACT

A study examined the role of the mass media in the development of people's conceptions about a neo-Nazi march planned for Skokie, Illinois, in 1978. The purpose of the study was to determine whether or not and in what respects different types of people had developed common conceptions about the event and what role the mass media played in that development. A content analysis of reports from newspapers, televised newscasts, and national newsmagazines revealed that while there were differences in the amounts of coverage given to the march, the relative emphasis on various aspects of the event was similar across the different media. A telephone survey of approximately 200 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania residents conducted just prior to the march, found that while respondents differed in awareness, interest, and opinions about it, according to religion, education, and age, they shared a number of similar conceptions and beliefs about the event. These conceptions were similar to the explicit and implicit messages about the march communicated by the mass media. (Extensive tables of data are included.) (Author/FL)

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED SOCIAL REALITY: THE NEO-NAZI MARCH IN SKOKIE

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ABSTRACT

MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED SOCIAL REALITY: THE NEO-NAZI MARCH IN SKOKIE

This study examines the role of mass communication in the development of people's conceptions about a neo-Nazi march planned for Skokie, Illinois, in 1978. The purpose of the study was to determine whether and in what respects different types of people had developed common conceptions about the event and what role mass communication might have played in this development.

A content analysis of news reports about the incident revealed that, while there were differences in the amounts of coverage given to the march, the relative emphasis on various aspects of the incident was quite similar across different media sources. In a telephone survey of Philadelphia area residents conducted just prior to the march, it was found that while respondents differed in awareness, interest, and opinions regarding the march, according to religion, education, and age, they shared a number of similar conceptions and beliefs about the incident. These shared conceptions were similar to the explicit and implicit messages about the march communicated by the mass media.

MASS COMMUNICATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED SOCIAL REALITY: THE NEO-NAZI MARCH IN SKOKIE

Research and theory on the effects of mass communication has begun to shift away from the earlier focus on short-term persuasion effects to an interest in less overt, unintended effects on audience cognitions -- assumptions, perceptions, conceptions, and beliefs (Becker et al., 1975; Clarke and Kline, 1974). This apparent change in the basic paradigm underlying the study of mass communication effects is perhaps best exemplified by the growing number of studies on the "agenda-setting" function of the news media (Benton and Frazier, 1976; Bowers, 1973; Funkhouser, 1973; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; McLeod, Becker and Byrnes, 1974; Palmgreen and Clarke, 1977; Tipton, Haney and Basehart, 1975). A related body of research, much of it the work of British sociologists and communication theorists, has focused on the manner in which mass media depictions and definitions can more generally shape audience conceptions and beliefs (Halloran, Elliott and Murdock, 1970; Hartmann and Husband, 1974; Kreiling, 1976). Murdock (1974), for example, has argued that the mass media serve as a major repository of information, imagery, and interpretive frameworks which people draw upon in framing their own conceptions of social and political structures and processes. In the U.S., a similar theoretical approach has been employed by Gerbner and his colleagues in

their studies of fictional television content: "The substance of the consciousness cultivated by TV is not so much specific attitudes and opinions as more basic assumptions about the 'facts' of life..." (Gerbner and Gross, 1976, p.175).

The emphasis in these recent studies on the role of mass communication in shaping people's awareness and knowledge about the world is not altogether unprecedented but was prefigured by such earlier theorists as Lippmann (1922), Park (1925), Lasswell (1948), Schramm (1954), Lang and Lang (1953), and others. Lippmann (1922), for example, asserted that human behavior is a response to the "pseudo-environment" created by the "pictures in our heads," which are based largely on "fictions," that is, humanly-created representations of the environment often created by the mass media.

What these earlier works and the more recent studies of agenda-setting and other cognitive effects of mass communication share is a common focus on the role of the mass media in the social construction of reality. All knowledge about reality can be said to be socially constructed in that it is shaped by the culture of the society in which it is based (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The social construction of reality is a process in which communication plays an essential role, since social reality is a consensual reality , based on the sharing of common assumptions and perspectives, and since it is through communication that shared perspectives are produced and maintained. Interpersonal communication has always served a social reality function for participants (Festinger, 1954).

With the development of increasingly sophisticated and ubiquitous forms of mass communication, the mass media have also come to play a significant part in the social construction of reality, particularly in regard to knowledge about those aspects of reality with which people have little or no direct contact. In fact, it has often been suggested that in a society as pluralistic and geographically far-flung as our own, where the maintenance of a shared social reality is more than a little problematic, the mass media make a major, though largely unwitting, contribution to the development of some degree of social consensus by providing a common set of symbols, images, and messages to diverse groups throughout the social system. There has been little empirical research, however, directly aimed at examining this assumption.

The present study was undertaken in order to examine the role of mass communication in the development of people's conceptions about a controversial event with which they had no direct contact and for which the mass media served as their primary source of information. The purpose of the study was to determine whether and in what respects different types of people had developed common conceptions about the event and what role mass communication might have played in this development.

Focus of the study

A specific event which had received a considerable amount of mass media attention -- a march by a group of neo-Nazis,

planned for the town of Skokie, Illinois, in the summer of 1978 -- was selected as the focus for the study. Basically, the study sought to examine the beliefs and opinions about the Skokie march and the neo-Nazis expressed by a sample of people distant from the event itself, and to compare these persons' views with the descriptions and definitions of the event presented by the mass media sources relied upon by the respondents. More specifically, the study was aimed at determining: (1) the substance of the mass media's definitions of the situation, and the degree of diversity or similarity in the definitions and descriptions presented by different media sources, and (2) the substance of people's conceptions about the event, and the degree of diversity or similarity in the conceptions held by different types of people. In short, the primary purpose of the study was to determine whether people with different background characteristics and different responses to the event along the dimensions of salience and opinions might nevertheless express similar responses to the event along another dimension -- that of beliefs and conceptions about the "facts" of the event, and in what respects such shared beliefs and conceptions might be associated with the common definitions of the event presented by the media.

As Lang and Lang (1968) have noted, the processes by which a collective definition of reality arises are best observed in situations that are not as yet clearly defined, where a degree of novelty, choice, conflict, or crisis creates a problem. The neo-Nazi march planned for Skokie, Illinois, seemed an appropriate topic for study, since it had become a national controversy by the time this study was undertaken, two to three

weeks before the event was scheduled to take place. A number of factors had made this event an issue of considerable interest and concern to the national news media and to many people beyond those immediately involved. For one thing, the population of Skokie was said to include a high percentage of Jews and, more specifically, survivors and relatives of victims of World War II Nazi concentration camps. The town of Skokie fought the planned march in the courts, including the Supreme Court, and the American Civil Liberties Union, an organization dedicated to upholding human and civil rights and one with a substantial Jewish membership, defended the neo-Nazis in court. At issue was the constitutional status of the march -- whether it was a legitimate expression of free speech and thus protected by the First Amendment, or a form of provocation and incitement to Skokie's residents. As the case made its way through the courts, the militant Jewish Defense League announced their intention to forcibly stop the march from taking place, even if it were legally condoned. As it turned out, although the Supreme Court eventually refused to overturn lower court decisions supporting the neo-Nazis' right to demonstrate in Skokie, the neo-Nazis decided to hold a rally in Chicago's Marquette Park instead, where they had also succeeded in overturning Chicago ordinances that would have impeded such a gathering. The neo-Nazis held their rally in Marquette Park on July 9, 1978. According to newspaper reports, about twenty neo-Nazis addressed a crowd of about 2,000 onlookers, while police barricades kept large groups of organized anti-Nazi counterdemonstrators from entering the park. The

rally was generally described as uneventful, though there were reports of some scuffling among onlookers and several arrests were made.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study consisted of two major components. First, in order to determine the beliefs, conceptions, and opinions about the "march" held by people distant from the event, a random sample of residents in two suburban Philadelphia communities, which will be referred to as Suburban Woods and Main Line, were interviewed by telephone between June 18 and June 29, 1978. The interviewers consisted of the author and about a dozen trained and supervised graduate students in communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Suburban Woods is a relatively affluent community with a large Jewish population, an area not unlike Skokie itself, while Main Line is an equally if not somewhat more prosperous neighborhood with a predominantly Protestant population. These two communities were selected because their populations were known to differ in religious composition, one of the demographic characteristics expected to affect respondents' interest and opinions in regard to the march and the neo-Nazis, while being of roughly comparable socioeconomic status. The data obtained from respondents in the two communities were then pooled, both for purposes of providing an overall look at people's views about the Skokie march and also for making comparisons among respondents in different religious, educational,

and other categories.

Out of 474 telephone numbers generated by adding four-digit random numbers to the three-digit telephone exchanges for the selected neighborhoods, a total of 192 completed interviews were obtained, divided almost equally between the two communities. Anyone at the household called who was at least eighteen years old and willing to participate was interviewed. Of the incompleted interviews, 43% represented refusals, while the remainder consisted of nonfunctioning numbers, no answers, non-English-speaking respondents, and respondents too young to participate. Since respondents were told only that they would be asked for their opinions about "some important issues today," the resulting sample was not systematically biased by respondents' views about the Skokie march itself. Through a combination of closed and open-ended questions, respondents were asked about their awareness, interest, beliefs, and opinions about the upcoming march and neo-Nazis in general; their usual patterns of news media use; and their demographic characteristics. Since religion, education, and age proved to be the variables most strongly associated with respondents' conceptions and opinions on this issue, such other variables as occupation, income, and national origin are not included in this discussion. All associations were initially measured by crosstabulation. For those variables which could be logically and meaningfully dichotomized, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were also obtained.

The second major component of this study consisted of a

content analysis of those news media most often cited as primary sources of information about the Skokie march and neo-Nazism by the respondents interviewed. In those media selected for analysis, reports about the events leading up to and including the Skokie march and Chicago rally and any other neo-Nazi activities or issues between January, 1977, the year in which references to the Skokie march first appeared in the news media, and July 9, 1978, the day the Chicago rally was finally held, were collected and analyzed. The analysis encompassed relevant material from the New York Times, the Philadelphia Bulletin, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the three national television evening news broadcasts (as summarized in Vanderbilt University's TV News Index and Abstracts), and Time and Newsweek magazines. Several specific television programs mentioned by the respondents were also examined: a segment of CBS-TV's "Sixty Minutes," originally broadcast February 20, 1977, which featured a report on the neo-Nazi movement in the U.S.; an installment of public television's "Black Perspective on the News" program, broadcast in the Philadelphia area on September 30, 1977, which consisted of an interview with Frank Collin, the leader of the neo-Nazi group planning the Skokie march, and David Duke, a Ku Klux Klan leader; and an episode of the fictional "Lou Grant" television show on CBS, which appeared to have been based on the Skokie march issue.[1]

A list of major topics and themes representing those aspects of the Skokie incident and neo-Nazism mentioned in the news content selected for analysis was produced inductively,

and each newspaper article, magazine article, and television news story abstract identified for analysis was multiply coded for each topic mentioned.[2] In addition, the specific words used to refer to these topics were also examined. The analysis included newspaper editorials, editorial cartoons, and op-ed columns as well.

The study also included an analysis of the role played by interpersonal communication in the development of people's conceptions and opinions about the march, based on the results of personal interviews with the members of several social networks of persons who had discussed the march with each other. However, this component of the larger study is not included in this discussion (see Holz, 1981).

Findings: Media Coverage

As Table 1 indicates, while there were some differences found among the different news sources examined in the coverage they provided of the Skokie march and related matters, these were primarily differences in the relative amounts of coverage given to the subject as a whole. These differences were consistent with the different roles and formats of the particular media studied. For example, of the three newspapers examined, the New York Times published a substantially greater number of articles on the Skokie march and other neo-Nazi activities and issues (89 articles) than either the Philadelphia Inquirer (55) or the Bulletin (34). This finding is unsurprising, given the Times' role as a newspaper of national

scope and the two Philadelphia dailies' role as primarily local news media. The national television news programs presented a far smaller number of individual reports about the march and the neo-Nazis (a total of 27 news stories for all three networks combined) and a narrower range of topics and themes within these reports than did the newspapers, and the newsmagazines published even fewer separate reports on these topics than did the other media (3 in Time, 2 in Newsweek), though their articles were of relatively greater scope and depth. Again, these findings were consistent with the differences in news space, time, and formats characteristic of these different media.

Despite these differences in the amounts of news coverage given to the Skokie march and related subjects in different media sources, however, considerable similarity was found in their treatment of the event, in terms of the relative emphases given to its various aspects (Table 1). The topic most frequently mentioned by all three newspapers studied and second in frequency in the television news stories was the characterization of Skokie as a Chicago suburb whose population was "predominantly Jewish" and included a large number of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Mention of this aspect of the Skokie incident was made in a majority of the relevant articles in each newspaper examined and a majority of the relevant news broadcasts on two of the three television networks.

The aspect of the Skokie march most often referred to in the television news reports was the litigation associated with

the event. The majority of the legal decisions reported in all the news sources examined were in favor of the neo-Nazis, finding that the march was covered by the provisions of the First Amendment and could not be legally stopped (Table 2). Due to the reporting of these decisions in the news media, references to reasons why the march should be allowed to take place place were more frequent than references to reasons against allowing the march to proceed (Table 1). The ACLU's role in representing the neo-Nazis in court was also frequently mentioned in this regard.

The topic ranking third in frequency of mention in all three newspapers and two of the three television networks consisted of references to Frank Collin, the leader of the neo-Nazi group involved in the Skokie incident. In a majority of these references in all the media sources examined, Collin was characterized as the "leader of the National Socialist Party of America," "American Nazi Party leader," or, more simply, as "Nazi leader Frank Collin."

The actual or likely characteristics of the planned neo-Nazi demonstration were also frequently mentioned. In the newspapers analyzed, the possibility or presence of violence at the event was the most common focus within this thematic category, though such references were made in less than 1/4 of the total number of articles on Skokie in each paper and in an even smaller fraction of all the television news reports about the incident. All reports which mentioned a specific group as the likely instigators of any violence cited either the

Jewish Defense League or the Skokie residents, and none indicated that the neo-Nazis would be the instigators (Table 3). Other references to the event's characteristics mentioned the counterdemonstrations against the neo-Nazis that were planned by various groups, and the possibility that the site for the event might be changed to Chicago's Marquette Park.

As for the specific terms used to refer to the event itself, the vast majority of the newspaper articles labeled the event planned for Skokie as a "march" and that planned for Chicago as a "rally." This distinction was less pronounced in the television news reports, where, as indicated by the TV News Index and Abstracts, ABC and NBC usually used the term "march" to describe both events, and CBS used either "march" or "demonstration."

The actual number of neo-Nazis expected to participate in the "march" or belonging to Collin's group was mentioned in no more than 1/4 of the reports in any of the news sources studied and was not referred to at all on two of the television networks. The majority of the references to the size of the march or group did not give specific figures but simply described it as "small," "tiny," "miniscule," or "a handful." A few of these reports did mention such specific numbers as 8, 20, 25, 41, 30-50, and 5-100, but none put their number at over 100. The group itself was most often referred to as the "National Socialist Party of America," the "Nazi Party of America," "the American Nazi Party," or simply as "the Nazi Party" or "the Nazis."

Few newspaper articles or television news reports attempted to place the neo-Nazis and the Skokie march within a broader context. Reports referring to the existence of groups espousing Nazism in other parts of the country or the world were few in number, and no more than a couple gave any indications as to the size of these other groups. Those few that did so estimated that there might be up to 2,000 such persons in the U.S. or referred to their numbers as "small" and "tiny." While a few reports linked the neo-Nazis with the Ku Klux Klan, most of these dealt with the "Black Perspective on the News" television program, on which representatives of the neo-Nazis and the Klan appeared together. There were few reports in the news sources studied that offered any explanations as to why neo-Nazi groups might exist in this country, what their sources of funding might be, what motivates people to join such groups, or what characteristics might be shared by such persons. Those few reports which did touch on such questions generally presented a picture of the neo-Nazis as mildly to seriously psychologically disturbed individuals or social misfits. For example, one of the three Time magazine articles examined, which presented an overview of the neo-Nazi groups in the U.S., began with a discussion of a recent incident in which a self-styled neo-Nazi named Fred Cowan had killed several people and then committed suicide. The article described neo-Nazis as "marginal types...with little self-esteem." The Cowan incident was also mentioned in the "Sixty Minutes" television program on neo-Nazis in the U.S., in which the neo-Nazi movement

was described as a "fanatic subculture" and which featured an extensive interview with a former neo-Nazi leader who was said to have spent most of his life in reform schools and prisons, often in a straitjacket and padded cell. On the "Lou Grant" television show episode about a neo-Nazi group involved in an incident much like that in Skokie, the character in the role of a Collin-like neo-Nazi leader ended up by committing suicide.

As for the opinions explicitly presented by the three newspapers studied in their editorials, columns, and political cartoons, these were almost unanimously in favor of the neo-Nazis' legal right to hold their march (Table 4). At the same time, however, the editorials and columns used strongly deprecatory language to refer to the neo-Nazis themselves and their ideology and activities, such as "disciples of a murderous doctrine," "despicable," "twisted minority," "sadistic madmen," "transparent psychotics," "moral vultures," and "odious vermin."

Respondent Opinions and Beliefs

Of the 192 persons interviewed shortly before the Skokie march was scheduled to take place, 88% reported some awareness of the incident. Unsurprisingly, Jewish respondents and more highly-educated respondents, who expressed more interest in the incident than other subgroups in the sample, were significantly more likely to report having heard about the march (Tables 5 and 6). Nevertheless, 79% of Catholics and 65% of respondents with no more than a high-school education -- the two subgroups who expressed the least amount of interest in

the march -- had also heard about it. Age made no difference in the likelihood that respondents had heard about the march.

Nearly all the respondents (97%) said they got most of their information about the Skokie march from the news media, with the majority (58%) citing newspapers as their primary source of information (the sample contained a high proportion of college-educated respondents). While about 2/3 of the sample reported having discussed the march with others at some time, only 7% had discussed it "often." As might have been expected, the frequency with which respondents had discussed the march was closely related to their expressed degree of interest in the incident (Table 7).

There was no significant relationship between respondents' usual frequency of news media use or number of information sources cited and their frequency of awareness about the march. Choice of newspaper, however, did make a significant difference in the probability of respondents' having heard about the event. All respondents who were regular readers of the New York Times reported an awareness of the march, while regular readers of the local papers were less likely to have heard about it (Pearson $r=.21$, $p<.01$). Controlling for religion and education level reduced but did not eliminate this association.

Of those who had some awareness of the event, over 60% replied that Skokie had been selected as the site for the march because of its predominantly or largely Jewish or Holocaust survivor population. Again, Jewish respondents and those who had completed four years of college were more likely to supply

this answer, but a majority of Catholics and Protestants and nearly half those respondents with no college training also offered this response (Table 8). Knowing the special characteristics of Skokie's population was not associated with higher frequencies of news media use, and New York Times readers were not significantly more likely than local newspaper readers to know about Skokie's characteristics.

Respondents' opinions as to whether or not the neo-Nazi march in Skokie should be allowed to take place differed according to religion, education level, and age, as had been expected, with Jewish, lesser-educated, and older respondents tending to hold negative opinions. However, age level was the only variable of the three to show a statistically significant relationship with respondents' opinions on this issue, and religious affiliation showed the weakest association of the three (Table 9).

While respondents' religion, education level, and age were to varying degrees associated with their awareness, interest, and opinions about the Skokie march, there were a number of beliefs and conceptions about the march and the neo-Nazis which did not appear to be significantly or systematically related to any of these respondent characteristics. For example, most respondents (55%) believed that there would be at least 100 neo-Nazis participating in the Skokie march, including 11% who predicted that over 1,000 neo-Nazis would take part. Only 27% of those responding thought there would be fewer than 100 marchers. Of those willing to make a pre-

diction, 72% thought there would be fighting at the march, and 92% of these thought that persons other than the neo-Nazis themselves would be the ones to start it.

Of those respondents who gave estimates of the number of neo-Nazis in the U.S. as a whole, about half guessed that there were over 2,000, or "very many" neo-Nazis in the country. However, almost 2/3 of the sample did not think the neo-Nazis posed a serious threat to the nation. In response to an open-ended question asking "what kind of people" were likely to be members of Nazi-type groups, 45% of the respondents chose to describe them in psychological terms, ranging from "lonely" and "insecure" to "disturbed," "crazy," and "psychotics." Only 15% described them in demographic or socioeconomic terms, and only 12% characterized them in terms of their political ideology. Interestingly, a number of those who described the neo-Nazis in political terms placed them on the left of the political spectrum, as "socialistic" or "like the Communists."

On this question and the others discussed above, religion, education level, and age made little systematic difference in respondents' answers. For the most part, these beliefs were also unassociated in a significant or linear way with respondents' frequencies or patterns of news media use or reported sources of information.

Relationship between Mass Media Coverage and Respondents' Conceptions

If one were to assess the influence of mass communication on people's views about the Skokie march simply by comparing

the opinions expressed in newspaper editorials and columns about the march, which were explicitly intended to influence public opinion on the issue, with the opinions expressed by the sample of Philadelphia area residents questioned in the survey portion of this study, one would be led to conclude that the news media had little effect. While the editorials to which the survey respondents had been exposed were almost unanimously in favor of allowing the march to be held, the majority of the respondents were against allowing the march to take place. Furthermore, respondents' awareness and beliefs about the march were for the most part unrelated to their frequency of news media use. On the other hand, almost all the respondents cited the mass media as their primary source of information about the march.

Though a direct association between respondents' usual amounts of news exposure and their beliefs about the Skokie march and the neo-Nazis was generally not indicated by this study's findings, a comparison between respondents' conceptions and the themes and terms in which the incident was presented by the media sources available to the respondents indicates several areas of correspondence between the two. For one thing, although Jewish and more highly-educated respondents were more likely to have heard about the march, it is significant that a majority of the respondents in all other religious and educational categories had also heard about it. This means that a considerable number of those respondent subgroups who claimed to have had little or no interest in the

event had nevertheless become aware of it. Since respondents' interest in the march was strongly associated with their participation in interpersonal communication about the subject, one can assume that these uninterested respondents learned about the incident from the mass media, which virtually all respondents cited as their primary information source on the subject.

That exposure to high levels of mass media coverage can overcome or substantially reduce potential differences in awareness about distant events and issues among groups with different social characteristics and different interests is further illustrated by this study's finding that readers of the New York Times, which carried about twice the number of reports about the Skokie march as did either of the two local Philadelphia papers read by the other respondents, were significantly more likely than local newspaper readers to have heard about the event. While Times readers were probably more likely to be interested in such nonlocal events to begin with, the greater amount of news about the march published in the Times must also have been a factor in these respondents' greater frequency of awareness about the event.

Not only did mass communication about the Skokie march affect people's awareness about the "march," but it also seems to have contributed to the cognitive framework within which people conceptualized the event. For example, though religion and education level were associated with the frequency with which respondents described Skokie as a predominantly Jewish or Holocaust survivor community, a majority of the non-

Jewish respondents and nearly half the least educated respondents also characterized the town in the same terms. It may be recalled that this aspect of the incident was the most frequent theme or "angle" in the news media's reports about the march described earlier (though there is actually some question about the percentages of Jews and Holocaust survivors living in Skokie, and several news reports noted that there were about 30,000 Jewish residents out of a total population of 70,000 -- not a majority). The fact that the various news media sources available to the respondents all presented a very similar picture of the march is not insignificant in this regard. Thus, while New York Times readers were more likely than readers of the local press to have heard about the march, they were not much more likely to "know" that Skokie's population was "predominantly Jewish." Since all three newspapers examined gave top priority to this item of information, readers of the different papers, if they learned about the Skokie march at all, learned about this aspect of the event in similar proportions.

There were a number of other beliefs about the Skokie march and the neo-Nazis which appeared to bear little if any relationship to respondent religion, education level, or age, or to respondents' usual frequencies of news media use: beliefs about the number of neo-Nazis that would participate in the march, whether or not fighting would occur at the march and who would start it, the total number of neo-Nazis in the U.S. and what kind of people they were, and whether such groups posed a threat to the country. In each case, the beliefs and

conceptions expressed most often by respondents were consistent with the messages, either explicit or implicit, that the mass media conveyed about these topics. For example, most respondents described the neo-Nazis in negative psychological terms, and those few media reports which described the neo-Nazis and their possible motivations characterized them in these terms. The media's depiction of the neo-Nazis as a collection of psychologically maladjusted individuals rather than a coherent political or social group may have led to or reinforced respondents' beliefs that such persons presented no serious threat to the country, despite most respondents' large estimates of their numbers.

Of those respondents giving estimates of the number of neo-Nazis they expected to participate in the march, and the total number of neo-Nazis in the U.S. as a whole, the majority believed that there would be over 100 and perhaps even several thousand neo-Nazi participants and that there were significant numbers of neo-Nazis in the country at large. While the specific figures given by the news media for both the total number of neo-Nazis in the U.S. and the size of the particular group involved in the Skokie incident were much lower than respondents' estimates, these figures were infrequently presented. And though some of the descriptive terms applied to the group -- "small," "tiny," "miniscule" -- also indicated that they were few in number, the use of such terms as "march" and "rally" to describe the event and references to the neo-Nazis as the "National Socialist Party of America" or the "American Nazi

Party" all connoted large numbers of participants. Furthermore, the sheer amount of news coverage given to the event may itself have led respondents to conclude that significant numbers of people must be involved.

About 3/4 of those questioned believed there would be fighting at the march, and most believed that the Jewish Defense League or other outsiders and not the neo-Nazis themselves would start it. Again, while explicit references to the possibility of violence occurring at the march were found in a relatively small proportion of all the news reports about the incident, references to planned counterdemonstrations and to arguments that the march was a form of provocation or incitement served as additional indications that violence was likely. Even the very use of such terms as "march," "rally," and "demonstration" may have had connotations of violence for news readers and viewers, since it was largely in terms of the expectation or occurrence of violence and disruption that such forms of civil protest had been found newsworthy in the past (Gans, 1979). As to who was likely to initiate the violence in this instance, none of the news media reports examined in this study stated or even implied that the neo-Nazis themselves were likely to do so.

Conclusions

All in all, a comparison of the beliefs about the Skokie march and the neo-Nazis expressed by most of the respondents in this study and the descriptions, definitions, and explanations

presented by the mass media has revealed many areas of correspondence, though the association between the two would seem to be neither linear nor direct. People with different background characteristics and different opinions and degrees of interest regarding the event had nevertheless come to share a number of beliefs and assumptions about it. First, a large majority of each subgroup examined had heard about the march. The event was therefore a common element in the social realities of these different groups. Furthermore, a majority of most of the groups "knew" that the village of Skokie had a predominantly Jewish population or many survivors of Nazi concentration camps living there. Most believed that the neo-Nazi march would be quite large, with over 100 neo-Nazis participating, that violence was likely to occur, and that the neo-Nazis would not be the ones to initiate the violence. And most viewed the neo-Nazis as psychologically troubled individuals who did not pose a serious threat to the country. In these respects, the members of the different social groups into which respondents were categorized shared a collective definition of the situation and a common reality in regard to this event. And this common view of reality can be traced to the picture of the event constructed for the respondents by their primary sources of information about the event -- the mass media.

Through mass communication, events and issues that would otherwise be known only to those persons having direct experience with them and to those others with whom these persons might discuss these experiences are put into the public realm, where they become part of a common public reality which diverse

and otherwise disparate individuals can draw upon in constructing their own social realities. This is not to suggest, however, that everyone exposed to this common fund of images and definitions will come away with exactly the same picture of the world. Processes of selective exposure, perception, and interpretation do operate to filter messages received from the mass media or elsewhere through audience members' existing values, attitudes, and beliefs. Nevertheless, in the case of those aspects of reality with which people have only mass-mediated contact, selective perception and interpretation by audience members necessarily occurs within the already defined and delimited context of the public reality constructed by the mass media. While the media do not have the power to determine the exact content of the social realities that different individuals construct, by controlling what information is made available and how it is presented and defined, they limit the range of interpretations that audiences can make (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976). Since different group-specific definitions of reality evolve in response to the same mass-communicated "facts," they will still have some elements in common and will therefore constitute different verions of the same basic reality. To the extent that these group-specific beliefs are more alike than different, the members of different social groups or aggregates can still be said to share a common social reality.

This analysis indicates that further research into the relationship between mass media content and people's cog-

nitions should take into account not only the amounts of media attention given to people, events, and issues, as is the case in agenda-setting studies, but also the conceptual framework and the terms within which such media coverage is presented. It also points up the need to consider not just the explicit messages conveyed by such media coverage but also the implicit connotations of these messages, which may be overlooked in strictly quantitative analyses.

NOTES

1. A transcript of the "Sixty Minutes" television program was obtained through the CBS News Index. A videotape of the "Black Perspective on the News" broadcast was viewed at the facilities of WHYY-TV in Philadelphia, which had produced the program. The "Lou Grant" show episode was seen by the author at the time it was aired.

2. If an article or news report mentioned a particular topic, it was coded positively for that topic, regardless of the number of times the topic was referred to in the article or report or the length of the discussion. Articles and reports were multiply coded, according to each topic mentioned. This produced a set of frequencies which thus refer to the number of news reports mentioning each topic. All coding was done by the author. The analysis was conducted primarily for descriptive purposes, and the categories developed have a simple face validity, having been derived from the news stories themselves. The categories seemed sufficiently broad and straightforward as to obviate the need for statistical tests of coding reliability.

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TABLE 1

Percent of News Reports about Skokie "March" and Other Neo-Nazi Activities Referring to Specific Major Themes

Themes	Newspapers			National TV News*		
	NY Times (N=89)	Inquirer (N=55)	Bulletin (N=34)	ABC (N=11)	NBC (N=7)	CBS (N=9)
A. Characteristics of Skokie: many Jews and Holocaust survivors	65%	55%	59%	55%	71%	44%
B. Characteristics of neo-Nazis						
1. Involved in Skokie/Chicago						
a. Leader Frank Collin	48	50	38	18	29	22
b. Size of group/march	24	18	26	0	14	0
c. Presence or absence of community support	2	0	15	9	0	0
2. Throughout USA						
a. General references	3	8	9	9	0	0
b. Ties or similarity to KKK	9	8	18	9	0	0
3. Throughout world/general	1	3	3	0	0	0
C. Issues and decisions related to litigation						
1. Court decisions	47	50	56	73	84	56
2. ACLU's involvement	37	28	35	18	29	11
3. Reasons <u>for</u> allowing "march"	22	28	29	9	0	11
4. Reasons <u>against</u> allowing "march"	10	20	24	0	0	0
D. Characteristics of event						
1. Possible or actual violence	20	23	21	18	14	11
2. Planned or actual counter-demonstrations	13	10	24	9	29	11

TABLE 1 (continued)

Themes	Newspapers			National TV News *		
	NY Times (N=89)	Inquirer (N=55)	Bulletin (N=34)	ABC (N=11)	NBC (N=7)	CBS (N=9)
3. Chicago as alternative site	17%	15%	9%	45%	29%	22%
E. Public expressions of support for Skokie and Jews	7	3	0	0	0	11
F. Other neo-Nazi activities and events						
1. Confrontations, conflicts, arrests	15	13	6	0	14	0
2. St. Louis march	4	5	0	0	0	0
3. "Black Perspective on the News"	4	5	9	0	0	0
4. Murders by avowed neo-Nazis	0	3	9	0	0	0

Note: News reports were multiply coded, so figures do not total 100%.

* Note small N's. Percentages for comparison purposes only.

TABLE 2

Outcome of Legal Decisions Reported by News Media in Skokie Case

Direction of Outcome	Newspapers			National TV News*		
	NY Times (N=42)	Inquirer (N=20)	Bulletin (N=19)	ABC (N=8)	NBC (N=6)	CBS (N=5)
In favor of neo-Nazis	64%	70%	89%	75%	83%	80%
Against neo-Nazis	17	25	11	0	0	0
Pending/mixed	19	5	0	25	17	20

*Note small N's. Percentages for comparison purposes only.

TABLE 3

Groups Mentioned by Media as Likely/Actual Instigators of Violence at Skokie March or Chicago Rally

Instigators of Violence+	Newspapers			National TV News*		
	NY Times (N=18)	Inquirer (N=9)	Bulletin (N=7)	ABC (N=2)	NBC (N=1)	CBS (N=1)
Jewish Defense League	56%	56%	29%	0	0	0
Skokie residents	17	22	43	50%	0	0
Neo-Nazis	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anyone/in general	28	67	57	50	100%	100%

+Note: Reports were multiply coded, so figures do not total 100%.

*Note small N's. Percentages for comparison purposes only.

TABLE 4

Positions Taken by Editorials, Columns, and Cartoons in Newspapers Examined

Position	NY Times (N=9)	Inquirer (N=9)	Bulletin (N=8)
In favor of allowing march	100%	67%	75%
Against allowing march	0	22	25
Neutral/mixed/unclear	0	11	0

TABLE 5

Awareness of Skokie March by Respondent Religion and Education Level

Answer	Religion*			No. Years of Education+		
	Jewish (N=61)	Catholic (N=52)	Protestant (N=55)	12 or less (N=43)	13-16 (N=95)	over 16 (N=46)
Yes	95%	79%	89%	65%	92%	98%
No	5	21	11	35	8	2

* $p < .05$
eta=.21

\+ $p < .01$
gamma=-.45

Question: "Have you heard about a march that a Nazi group is planning to hold in Skokie, Illinois, some time soon?"

TABLE 6

Interest in Skokie March, by Religion and Education Level

Answer	Religion*			No. Years of Education		
	Jewish (N=56)	Catholic (N=31)	Protestant (N=43)	12 or less (N=28)	13-16 (N=85)	over 16 (N=45)
Very interested	54%	23%	12%	25%	31%	28%
Somewhat interested	44	35	58	36	48	58
Not at all interested	2	42	30	39	21	14

* $p < .0001$

Question: "How interested have you been in keeping up with the news about the Skokie march? Would you say you've been: very interested, somewhat interested, or not at all interested?"

TABLE 7

Respondents' Interest in Skokie March, by Participation in Interpersonal Discussion about March

Extent of Interest	Discussion about March	
	Ever	Never
	(N=109)	(N=55)
Very	41.3%	3.6%
Somewhat	52.3	43.6
Not at all	6.4	52.7

p<.0001 gamma=.86

TABLE 8

Respondents' Information about Skokie, by Religion and Education Level

Answer	Religion*			No. Years of Education+			
	Jewish (N=58)	Catholic (N=41)	Protestant (N=49)	12 or less (N=28)	13-15 (N=39)	16 (N=48)	over 16 (N=45)
Large Jewish or Holocaust survivor population	81%	51%	51%	46%	56%	60%	80%
Other/don't know	19	49	49	54	44	40	20

* $p < .01$

+ $p < .05$
gamma=-.36

Question: "Why do you think the Nazis selected Skokie as the place for the march?"

TABLE 9

Correlation between Opinions on Skokie March and Religion, Education, and Age (Pearson Product-Moment Coefficients)

Respondent Characteristics	r	p
Religious Affiliation (Jewish/nonJewish)	.14	n.s.
Education Level (college/no college)	-.17	p=.05
Age (50 or over/under 50)	.38	p<.001